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ABSTRACT

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Our Grandmother of the Shawnee: Messages of a Female Deity

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

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Abstract Principles of narrative analysis provide the foundation for a study of messages from the Shawnee female deity. The Shawnee hold a unique theological conception of their Creator, a female deity known as *Our Grandmother*. The purpose of this study is to investigate the origin and nature of the Shawnee female deity and reveal mediums of communication She has used to communicate with Her Shawnee people. This study provides an overview of Shawnee narratives, folklore, and spiritual beliefs. A major goal of this paper is to investigate Her unique messages to the Shawnee and the powerful impact Her words have had on Shawnee culture. The paper demonstrates the Shawnee female deity, *Our Grandmother*, had four separate, discernable message revelation techniques for chosen Shawnee individuals and four general message revelation techniques for Her grandchildren, the Shawnee people.

Introduction

Spirituality remains a cornerstone of Native American cultures (Thorton, 1998, Rogers and Steinfatt, 1999, Voegelin, 1936). One must investigate the spiritual beliefs of a people group in order to better understand their culture (Rogers and Steinfatt,1999). This study explores the Supreme Deity narratives of an Algonquin people known to English speakers as the Shawnee. Although the Shawnee have always been historically included in the Algonquin language group, their particular and unique beliefs about the Creator of the world merit closer inspection. Many Native American tribal groups generally ascribed the masculine gender to

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the Great Spirit. The Shawnee, however, particularly before 1830 and the Indian Removal Act, held to a belief that the Supreme Creator was female (Morgan, 1967, Voegelin, 1936).

As with most all other Native American peoples, recognizing balance in the world remained of paramount importance (Thorton, 1998, Rogers and Steinfatt, 1999). In this study, recognition of the importance of the numbers four and twelve help provide new insight into the study of Shawnee spiritual beliefs. For example, the Shawnee recognize the "four corners" (four cardinal directions), four seasons, four winds, four levels of the world, and four lives of animals. The Shawnee recognize twelve clans, twelve witnesses, and all feasts, dances and ceremonies are scheduled to last four to twelve day periods. These numbers become important when studying the Native Americans, but more importantly, the Shawnee (Brinton, 1969, Thornton, 1998). The significance of these numbers becomes apparent as the reader follows the progress of this study.

This study provides an overview of Shawnee narratives, folklore, and spiritual beliefs. A major goal of this paper is to investigate the origins of the Shawnee Female Deity, Her unique messages to the Shawnee, and the powerful impact Her words have had on the Shawnee people. This paper demonstrates *Our Grandmother* has eight separate, but discernable message revelation techniques for Her Grandchildren (the Shawnee). Message themes

include "keep my bundles sacred, observe my prescribed celebrations, keep my laws and listen for my special prophetic revelations" (Voegelin, 1936).

Origins

Although many Native American groups have included feminine deity figures in their worship, the Shawnee held a unique female deity known to them as *Kuhkoomtheyna,* or *Our Grandmother*, as their Supreme Creator. In various other textual references, She is labeled by terms that can be translated as the "Creator," "the Supreme Being," "Universe Ruler," "Beautiful Cloud," "Author of Life," and/or "the First Woman" (Bush, 1977).

According to Shawnee mythology, *Our Grandmother* descended from the world above (Sky World) and created the basis or the foundation of the earth, the turtle. *Our Grandmother* shaped the world, all bodies of water and tracts of land, and rested her newly created world on the back of the turtle. *Our Grandmother* performed most of the cosmic creations. At this same time She, with her grandson *Cloud Boy* and their little dog, rested on the earth (Bush, 1977).

Though some disagreement has occurred among scholars, recently interviewed Shawnee informants maintain, "*Our Grandmother* has been consistently worshipped as the Divine Being and Great Spirit since our time began" (Standing Bear, 2000). Morgan (1959) wrote, "The God anciently and consistently worshipped by the Shawnee was a female creator called *Our*

Grandmother." Voegelin (1937) describes the belief in *Our Grandmother* as characteristic of all of the Shawnee clans.

Creation

Shawnee theology, through a carefully constructed synthesis, proposes four distinct phases, or periods of creation. In each of these phases, *Our Grandmother* appears actively engaged in the creative process.

Four Phases of Creations

Phase I
Chaos to Creation

Creation occurs from chaos. *Our Grandmother* creates the universe and elements of matter. Other 'Sky World' figures appear, apparently through the creative hand of *Our Grandmother*. These include 'Corn Person,' 'Star People,' 'Sun Person', Her two grandsons, Her little dog and Moon Woman (who lives close enough to *Our Grandmother* to be her shadow or, in some instances, could be considered an actual reflection of *Our Grandmother*). (Brinton, 1969; Bush, 1977; Downes, 1940; Harvey, 1855; Spence, 1986; Trowbridge, 1939; & Voegelin, 1936).

Phase II
Cloud Boy's Contribution

Our Grandmother allows her grandson, 'Cloud Boy' (sometimes also known as Rounded-Side) variant license in creative actions. In this stage, the roots of human weakness and destructive influences appear. 'Cloud Boy' also appears responsible for some comical actions and even foolishness. For example, the Shawnee believe that 'Cloud Boy' shapes clouds into likenesses of animals, people, mountains and other comical shapes to entertain and delight mortals here on earth. He has also been accused of moving objects (articles of clothing, personal belongings, etc) in order to "joke" with the Shawnee people. (Brinton, 1969; Bush, 1977; Downes, 1940; Harvey, 1855; Spence 1986; Trowbridge, 1939; & Voegelin, 1936).

Phase III
Great Deluge

Immediately after the flood (Great Deluge), *Our Grandmother* still lived on the earth. Various narrative accounts exist, but *Our Grandmother* escaped the devastation. After she kindled a 'new fire,' she began the task of recreation. Curiously enough, *Our Grandmother* did not create the Shawnee first, but began with the Delaware. Later, she created the first two Shawnee divisions. Her grandson, 'Cloud Boy,' created two more and finally *Our Grandmother* brought all of the Shawnee people together and they ultimately numbered five divisions. The Shawnee tribal divisions include Thawikila, Pekowi, Kishpoko, Chalakaatha, and Mekoche. (Brinton, 1969; Bush, 1977; Downes, 1940; Harvey, 1855; Spence 1986; Trowbridge, 1939; & Voegelin, 1936).

Phase IV
Final Creative Actions

In the final phase of creation, *Our Grandmother* affords the acquisition of fire and the proper ways in which to kindle this sacred fire. She assigns guardian spirits, explains and assigns the sacred bundles and sets the ceremonies, rituals and rites to which all Shawnee must comply. She moves to her heavenly home in the 'Sky World' and begins weaving her 'doomsday net' (skemotah) so that faithful and/or worthy Shawnee can be collected and 'saved.' (Brinton, 1969; Bush, 1977; Downes, 1940; Harvey, 1855; Spence 1986; Trowbridge, 1939; & Voegelin, 1936).

Yet, the question must still be posed, "Where and when did the concept of *Our Grandmother* originate?" Her beloved grandchildren, the Shawnee, know her as the author of life, the restorer of the earth and the punisher of evil. She once resided on the earth, but now lives as a spirit-god in a part of the 'Sky World.' Several other questions persist:

- How and when did the Shawnee identify this powerful female deity?
- How did She reveal Herself to them?

- Is She a culmination of centuries of attempts by the Shawnee to understand their universe, their place in it and their powers in relationship to its mysteries?

- Why did the Shawnee identify this female deity, while many other Algonquin and contemporary Native American groups continue to develop their narratives of the Great Spirit as He?

A general review of the appropriate literature affords four possible explanations for the preceding questions. Regardless of the explanations one might accept, documents, oral tradition and historical accounts demonstrate that *Our Grandmother* became an animate, divine being for the Shawnee. The emergence of a Shawnee female deity known as *Our Grandmother* may be analyzed by one of four explanations.

One possible explanation offers the notion She is a natural result of an Algonquin narrative involving the two cultural heroes known as Michabo and Chibiabos. These two, Michabo representing good and Chibiabos representing evil, were said to be the grandsons of Nokomis, or 'Mother Earth.' Many Algonquin speaking *Our Grandmother* peoples believed the two powerful grandsons were born to a female creator, or spirit-god. The Shawnee, being part of the Algonquin language group, could have developed their beliefs about *Our Grandmother* from these early narrative accounts (Bush, 1977).

A second explanation for the identification of *Our Grandmother* as the Shawnee deity may arise from a story of the *Theft of Fire* prevalent among the Algonquin tribes. In this story, a young man called Manabush seeks

permission from his 'grandmother' (Nokomis) to travel across the waters to the island where an old man resided. This 'old man,' so many said, had fire. According to the story, Manabush was successful and fire became an important possession of the Native American. The 'grandmother' becomes the authority figure in this story and possibly the Shawnee recognized her insight, strength and power. In any case, later Shawnee narratives give credit to *Our Grandmother* as the ultimate keeper and grantor of fire (Brinton, 1969, Bush, 1977).

A third possible explanation for the Shawnee having a supreme female deity results from the mere fact that Native Americans in general, and the Algonquins in particular, called the earth 'Mother.' In calling the earth, 'Mother,' the Shawnee assumed an intimacy with the earth, thereby bonding themselves to the potency of her special powers and forces. The Shawnee became, in a sense, a part of Mother Earth's balance, greatness and authority. A 'Mother Earth' concept could have eventually emerged as *Our Grandmother*, the Supreme Being, or Great Spirit (Voegelin, 1937).

The final possible explanation could rest in the very process of life itself. The Shawnee recognized that life resulted through the power of the woman. To the Shawnee, all of creation gained life and sustenance through the woman. The concept of a deity's compassion toward humans, the recognition of creation and regeneration, and the entire process of creatures nurturing their young could have promoted the development of the

theological conception of *Our Grandmother* as the Shawnee female deity (Painted Hand, 2000).

Naturally, the revelation of *Our Grandmother* as Supreme Being to the Shawnee could also be the result of a combination of any (or all) of the preceding ideas. As one of the more recent informants remarked, "Just because God has revealed Herself to us as female doesn't make Her any less true than the male God of the Whites. She revealed Herself to us. We believe in *Our Grandmother*" (Standing Bear, 2000).

Though one might remain skeptical, or unconvinced as to how this central belief occurred, no one can question the fact that this belief did occur. The Shawnee held the intrinsic belief that the creator of the entire universe was a divine female personage known to them as *Our Grandmother*. "She establishes, observes, or participates in every aspect of the Shawnee religion. As a holy figure, *Our Grandmother* is unquestionably supreme." (Voegelin,1936). However, only recognizing *Our Grandmother* as the Supreme Being does not satisfy Her. She has messages for the Shawnee, and the identification of such messages have valuable insight for scholars of communication, specifically, Native American scholars.

The Messages of Our Grandmother

Our Grandmother revealed Her messages socially to the entire Shawnee tribe and/or specifically to individual members of the tribe. In

typical Native American form. Her messages are revealed as four social, or public revelations and four specific, or personal revelations. In order to clearly understand the revelation of the Shawnee female deity, one must review all of Her eight methods of communication. The eight methods of communication attributed to *Our Grandmother* deserve examination.

Social Messages: Sacred Bundles

The first, and possibly the most important message from *Our Grandmother* remains: "keep your sacred bundle carefully." (Howard, 1981, Harvey, 1855, Voegelin, 1954). In other words, the Shawnee and, more specifically, the divinely assigned bundle keeper, had to keep the bundle safe, secure and protected from theft, the weather or neglect. (Standing Bear, 2000).

Each of the five divisions of the Shawnee was gifted with a sacred bundle. This bundle contained various elements prescribed by *Our Grandmother*, or represented certain events that were particularly significant for each division. Often, the items contained in the bundles were reminders of special blessings, sacred beliefs, or powerful totems critical to the survival of the Shawnee. Though kept and treated with sacred care, the bundles were shrouded in mystery even to their appointed custodians. Voegelin (1936) writes, "One senses that during ceremonial dances the Shawnee talk about *Our Grandmother* but think about their sacred bundles."

Often, the items contained in the bundles were reminders of special blessings, sacred events sacred beliefs or powerful totems critical to the survival of the Shawnee (Bush, 1977, Spotted Fawn, 2000).

Referred to as the 'Messawmi,' the Sacred Bundle was a gift to each Shawnee clan from *Our Grandmother* given immediately before she moved beyond the Sky World. The Shawnee felt bound to the Omnipotence through this special gift. This bundle "endowed each clan composing the Shawnee nation, the potency of inspiration which always remains with the clan as its very life and inspiration." (Galloway, 1934) "All of the Mishaami were given to the Shawnee by *Kokumthena*, who can still control them and will inform a chosen prophet if she desires a change in either the contents of the bundle, or a specific ritual surrounding a bundle. Sacred bundles are kept in a special place, regarded and treated like human beings. Sacred bundles are often moved so that they don't become uncomfortable, or cramped" (Hubbard-Brown, 1995).

The sphere of the sacred bundle is all embracing rather than specific. In reality, the ultimate insight into the Shawnee faith rests in the respect, history, and origin of these sacred bundles. To the Shawnee, they provide the most sacred approach to *Our Grandmother*. "The bundles provide for extremely holy, possibly esoteric communications from the Creator to the Shawnee. Immediately preceding the end of the world, *Our Grandmother* will recall the bundles" (Voegelin, 1936).

Specific Messages: Sacred Pouches

Just as the bundles represented the key mediums of relating to *Our Grandmother* for the five divisions, so the Pawaka (the individual totem bundle) emerged as the personal form of the Messawni (Bush, 1977). In other words, the Pawaka became the personal sacred bundle. Elements of the Pawaka were earned by worthy accomplishments, personal achievements, and personal preparations rather than by free gifts from *Our Grandmother* (Painted Hand, 2000).

"Indeed, individual Shawnee possessed their own personal guardian spirits, identified in adolescence during vision quests where youths fasted and meditated. These tutelary spirits, commonly conceived to be animals, made themselves known through dreams, hallucinations, or some other revelatory event" (Bush, 1977).

Young boys obtained elements of the Pawaka during their Vision Quests. During periods of seclusion, fasting, and meditations the boys had special visions, heard unusual noises, or saw animal images. These experiences were considered personal and supernatural. Through these experiences, Shawnee people received their individual totems and spirit guides. "New ceremonies might originate in an individual totemic vision and could be incorporated into the village patterns. Totemic visions were sought during trances" (Clark, 1995).

Guarded carefully, few Shawnee will speak explicitly about these particular aspects of their religion. Yet, the hidden relationship that exists between the powers sought (or received) and the visionary experience, which affects the individual deeply, brings personal revelation from *Our Grandmother* (Callender, 1978).

Social Messages: Ceremonies, Rituals and Dances

Our Grandmother reigns as supreme deity of ceremonies, rituals and dances for the Shawnee. Her message to the Shawnee remains, "keep the dances and ceremonies sacred, so I will be nourished and you will be prosperous" (Galloway, 1934). From the Bread Dance to the Green Corn Dance, the Shawnee gather for symbolic hunts, feasts, and dance festivals in order to honor the Master of Life. These annual ceremonial dances provide a chief vehicle for worshipping *Our Grandmother*. Shawnee ceremonialism was designed to focus sacred power where it was needed (Alford,1936).

The annual ceremonial dances are performed in order to worship *Our Grandmother*, thereby preserving the tribe and the world. Even if a ceremony is not primarily devoted to Her, She will notice and punish any neglect. The dead, as well as the living, must participate in Her ceremonies, wear Shawnee paint and dress in the Shawnee manner so that *Our Grandmother* will not mistake them for white people on the day she brings her grandchildren home to Her country (Hubbard-Brown, 1995).

The many feasts suggested by *Our Grandmother* provide Her opportunities to visit the Shawnee. Though the relationship between feast events and *Our Grandmother* is indirect, the ceremonies provide opportunities for her to visit with her grandchildren. *Our Grandmother* constantly observes the Shawnee from her home above, using her well-known 'Sky Window' (Bush, 1977)

In addition, *Our Grandmother* makes certain appearances on earth to inspect, or participate in ceremonies at closer range. She has been known to visit the Shawnee during the First Fruits ceremony in order to taste the food set out for Her. She has been heard singing above the arbor during the Bread Dances. Performance of these various ceremonies and dances preserve the Shawnee and the world. Sometimes, mounted warriors ride around the dance ground four times just to amuse *Our Grandmother*, who comes to earth for the day to view the celebration and dance (Voegelin, 1936). She has even been known to make a visit during the active ballgames of the Shawnee. "She smiles in approval when in the speech before the ballgame it is said that the ball games are played because they were ordained by her rules" (Voegelin, 1936).

These various visitations put the Shawnee in direct contact with *Our Grandmother*. Each ceremony was devoted to thanking the Creator, or beseeching Her for favors. All of the major ceremonies of the Shawnee were, and are, believed to have originated with *Kokumthena* (Hubbard-Brown,

1995). These moments of contact put the Shawnee in intimate contact with an ultimate power that shapes their lives, guides their values and provides a sense of control and purpose for the Shawnee (Painted Hand, 2000).

Specific Messages: Witness Ceremonies

For *Our Grandmother* to communicate with her grandchildren (the Shawnee) individually, She has created a number of intermediaries known as Tipwiwe. The Tipwiwe may be translated as "Truth bearers" or "Witnesses." The Tipwiwe carry the words of prayer to the Creator and likewise attest to the sincerity of the supplicant (Howard, 1981).

One important truth bearer is tobacco. In fact, Howard (1981) observed that tobacco worked as a witness in two ways. In small or minor occasions, the faithful respondent uses only a pinch of true Shawnee tobacco in the private ceremony. A pinch on the ground right after a successful deer hunt, or a small amount placed on the ground after lifting some herbs from the earth. These minor, but important, observances allow the Shawnee personal communication with *Our Grandmother*. During major community events, a Shawnee person can take a palm full of the special tobacco and toss it into the fire. The smoke takes prayers and messages up to *Our Grandmother* so that She can "notice" the faithful person, family or tribe and know the sincerity of the act (Howard, 1981).

Other "witnesses" include water, the eagle, fire, the hawk, the four winds and stars. Cedar remains an important component of the fires ignited

by the sincere Shawnee worshipper. The sacred fire of the Shawnee alerts *Our Grandmother* of the intention of a personal approach by one of Her grandchildren. Witnesses allow any one of the Shawnee communities to communicate with *Our Grandmother* and hear Her confirmation of their faith. *Our Grandmother* confirms Her watch care of the Shawnee through these truth bearers. The truth bearers and witnesses stand ready to assist the faithful Shawnee in ceremony and worship (Standing Bear, 2000, Painted Hand, 2000).

Public Messages: Foreknowledge and Prophecy

Our Grandmother, being the Supreme Being, can deliver prophetic messages through bundle ceremonies, dance ceremonies, Sky World visitations, signs and individual insight. The Creator bestowed the gift of prophecy. Although revealed to individuals, the prophetic messages were regarded as benefiting the tribe and thus remain communal in effect. These messages were for the entire tribe (Howard, 1981).

Individuals having prophetic insight do not learn about their own personal future but the future of all Shawnee, or all people, or even the future of the world as a whole. *Our Grandmother* rather exclusively dispenses this foreknowledge. Since She no longer lives on earth, the Shawnee person must make a journey to Her home in order to communicate and receive new revelation from Her. The gift of prophecy granted by the

Creator is really a subtle means of insuring the continuation of all of the old time ceremonies (Voegelin, 1936).

On many occasions, special invitations were issued to individual Shawnee allowing a visit with *Our Grandmother*. She would entertain the selected representatives in her Wigiwa and deliver a special message for the whole tribe. After the visit, the fortunate human messenger returned to the Shawnee people and delivered the world of *Our Grandmother*. The Shawnee heard from *Our Grandmother* through these various revelations and prophecy (Howard, 1981).

Specific Messages: The Vision Quest

The Vision Quests, on the other hand, were exclusively an individual undertaking, although the expectation remained that "prophetic visions would occur" (Voegelin, 1936). The special message and blessings were not necessarily for public knowledge. However, if the persons received very potent visions, they could consequently become 'sweat-lodge doctors,' healers, leaders, or prophets. Both girls and boys were encouraged to engage in the vision quest. Shawnee children started this ritual at around the age of seven, earlier than most other Native American children (Voegelin, 1936, Galloway, 1934).

Guardian spirits provide interpretation and revelation from *Our Grandmother*. Guardians are especially active during vision quests and at

other spiritual revelations or journeys. In fact, some individuals who have received the assignment of their guardian spirit may relate, in the name of prophecy, the message of the guardian spirit rather than directly quoting *Our Grandmother*. "Waiting spirits rove about everywhere in the invisible world hoping for a child to find them. If we search long enough, we find them. The spirit sings a song for the child to learn and use when calling upon the spirit guardian" (Morning Dove, 2000). In this sense, the guardian spirit would presumably act as an intermediary between the Creator and the individual receiving the revelation (Voegelin, 1936, Standing Bear, 2000).

The revelations received in these quests were private, unless otherwise prescribed by *Our Grandmother*. If tribal service was deemed necessary, then the ability to perform 'supernatural' actions became communal in nature and generally included special communication (prayers) with *Our Grandmother*. Prayers were offered up to *Our Grandmother* at first-fruit ceremonies, funerals, naming rituals, annual events/dances, and at the end of the ballgame season (Callender, 1978).

Public Messages: Sacred Shawnee Law

The Shawnee Laws (saawanwa kwteletiiwena), a very important part of the knowledge and instruction received from *Our Grandmother*, includes twelve precepts. The laws represent a stable part of the Shawnee culture and provide an insight into life for the tribe before contact with Europeans.

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Shawnee laws were handed down during the post-flood creation phase, when *Our Grandmother* brought all five tribal divisions together to receive Her instructions. In the lengthy admonishments, she taught the Shawnee how to "take care of themselves, how to live, how to conduct ceremonial dances, how to raise corn and hunt, what kind of houses to build and gave them other laws" (Voegelin, 1936). She also gave laws with the assurance that 'manitos' or spirit guides, such as Bear, Wolf, Deer and Eagle, would accompany the Shawnee and give them insight and constant contact with Her.

The laws are noteworthy for their extreme length and comprehensiveness of subject matter. Male laws are taught to young boys and the female laws are to be taught to young girls. The laws were finally recorded in the first person as though *Our Grandmother* herself were talking directly to the Shawnee people (Voegelin, 1936). A synopsis laws includes:

- The first law sets forth the origin and purpose of *Our Grandmother's* precepts and describes the benefits of following Her law and the consequences of failing to observe them. Modes of sexual conduct during intercourse are outlined along with requirements of behavior during menstruation and pregnancy.

- The second law is general in scope (Callender, 1978). The ten remaining laws center on a particular animal such as the deer, bear, dog, birds, wolf, buffalo, raccoon, turtle, turkey and crow. The laws described services the animal rendered to the Shawnee and the manner in which the animal should be treated. The number of laws (12) also equaled the number of septs or clans that existed for the Shawnee. Each of the clans used many of the preceding animal totems to represent their particular clan and there were twelve of these as well (Callender, 1978).

Personal Messages: Special Sounds and Signals

One of the most interesting and distinct manners *Our Grandmother* uses to communicate with individuals comes in the form of "unique sounds." Unique sounds are specific signals to good persons among chiefs and councilors, who are created with special insight and able to translate the very thoughts of the Creator (Voegelin, 1936). In fact, She promises to make specially selected agents "faultless in speech and providing deeply powerful council for all others in the tribe" (Voegelin, 1936).

Painted Hand (2000), a quiet, unassuming Shawnee man residing in West Virginia, spoke quietly when he said,

> "I do not wish to say much about this. My brothers and sisters in other places may have more to say. I know that *Our Grandmother* has always placed wise ones in the circle so that they could interpret Her thoughts and deliver Her special messages. She gives special signals to chosen ones...others around cannot make out the meaning. The sound will not be understood by others, but the chosen one can tell us the special message She is giving to us as a people, or to an individual".

The special sounds that have been mentioned cannot be described. The various informants speak carefully about these various types of revelations and maintain only the "wise ones" recognize the sounds and signals. Special signals seem to operate like the sounds that occur over the heads of Shawnee participants during the various festivals and dances. As

previously mentioned, Shawnee believe that the voice of *Our Grandmother* can be heard above the voices of singers during the festivals (Howard, 1981).

The chosen person to deliver the special revelations offered by *Our Grandmother* usually receives the message during a council meeting, bundle ceremony, or other significant festival. The messages may be delivered immediately, or the message medium may take time to translate the "thoughts, desires or wishes of *Our Grandmother*" (Painted Hand, 2000). This practice is different from prophecies, for there may be no predication, or warning involved.

Many times the messages seem to be a confirmation of action, personal insight, or affirmation of leadership ability. In many ways, revelations from *Our Grandmother* work as an endorsement, or recommendation to others around the "chosen one who has heard the message of *Our Grandmother*" (Painted Hand, 2000).

Conclusion

Spiritual concerns have always rested at the heart of Native American life. Their faith and spiritual beliefs are consummated in a holistic, cosmic view of the universe. Native Americans regard the earth as their mother and believe that land cannot be owned. The earth is a spiritual part of the Native American and people are a part of the earth. People must live in harmony with plants, animals, the earth and other people. Native Americans tend to

see the world as having infinite space and time that cycles through seasons, and the four cardinal directions. To the Native American, all of life is spiritual (Rogers and Steinfatt, 1999).

In the contemporary world of the Shawnee people, *Our Grandmother* receives few visitors in Her actual home. The people received are Shawnee individuals who have prophetic inclinations. Her communication to modern visitors consists chiefly in advice not to deviate from Her established ways, and, or involve special revelations for the future (Voegelin, 1936).

This study provided an overview and interpretation of the messages, both public and private, which have originated with *Our Grandmother*, the Shawnee female deity. Her themes, including bundles, celebrations, laws and special revelations, have been discussed in terms of meaning and content. The paper has revealed the manner in which *Our Grandmother* has communicated to her Grandchildren, the Shawnee people, and the importance at Her communication to the Shawnee way of life.

Potentially, *Our Grandmother* reserves the right to create new messages and ceremonies by instructing any of Her new visitors, or guests as to what to do when they return to earth. In this way, the Female Deity remains active in the lives of the contemporary Shawnee. Her actions benefit the Shawnee directly and other humans in many indirect ways (Spotted Fawn, 2000).

Today, *Our Grandmother* sits quietly in Heaven watching all people, but especially the Shawnee. She smiles if the Shawnee follow Her rules. She remembers Her Grandchildren, the Shawnee, and sympathizes with them when they follow Her precepts. She sends 'manitos' to talk with Her people, provide guidance, and give them hope. Her messages resound through the sacred bundles, sacred laws, prophecies, ceremonies and dances. Observing these messages, "the Shawnee must live, multiply and follow the manitos on the path to Heaven (Standing Bear, 2000).

Scholars of the Shawnee way of life must address and understand the value and importance of Her messages. This paper represents an examination of the impact of Her communication upon the beliefs and behaviors of Shawnee people. The female Supreme Deity has provided her Grandchildren with a set of narratives designed for providing a structure and sense of guidance for daily living. Shawnee theology provides four phases of creation, eight specific types of communicative, divine messages, and twelve laws specific to the twelve Shawnee septs or clans. This study has explored the active engagement of the Shawnee Female Deity in the process of communication with her Shawnee grandchildren. Hopefully, this paper has provided valuable insight to students of Shawnee culture and offered a more comprehensive examination of the impact of Her communication with the Shawnee people.

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